

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Couture is about more than expensive clothes: Maria Grazia Chiuri

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Since taking the reins at Dior, Maria Grazia Chiuri has explored today's femininity. Image credit: Dior

By SARAH JONES

LISBON, Portugal What separates couture from ready-to-wear is more than a price tag, according to the artistic director of Christian Dior.

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During the Cond Nast International Luxury conference on April 18, the designer explained that the traditional craft that goes into couture is one-of-a-kind. In the Dior atelier, a new generation is eager to learn about this form of craftsmanship, allowing the heritage to be passed down.

"People believe that couture is only about something expensive," said Maria Grazia Chiuri, artistic director for Dior's women's wear collections. "Couture is something more."

Discussing Dior

Since arriving at Christian Dior in 2016, Ms. Chiuri has celebrated feminism and empowerment through designs and marketing, such as a shirt reading "We should all be feminists" ([see story](#)).

Dior's spring/summer 2018 collection was inspired by French-American artist Niki de Saint Phalle, who was a friend of designer Marc Bohan during his days at the helm of Dior.

The runway show opened with a look that included a T-shirt emblazoned with the phrase, "Why have there been no great women artists?" This comes from the title of a Linda Nochlin essay that inspired the collection ([see story](#)).



Dior's spring/summer 2018 campaign. Image credit: Dior

Ms. Chiuri noted that fashion and art influence each other, and female artists' work tends to cover topics such as bodies and women. She hopes that the next generation of girls can aspire to be the next Caravaggio.

While these efforts are feminist, the designer says that these they evolved from translating Dior's femininity to today.

With her hire, much was made of her place as the first female creative director in the house's history, but the designer was surprised that it was a focus for others.

Dior produces six women's wear collections per year. When questioned by moderator and International Vogue editor Suzy Menkes about the strain put on designers today, Ms. Chiuri pointed out that six may not seem like a lot, but ready-to-wear lines include many components such as accessories.

While designers can choose to focus primarily on their runway collections, Ms. Chiuri has a hand in everything from the show to window displays and merchandising. She says that taking this approach allows for a clearer brand message for the season.



Dior's Maria Grazia Chiuri speaking with International Vogue's Suzy Menkes. Image credit: Cond Nast

Since not everyone can attend the same runway show, the store becomes a platform for translating the vision to consumers.

When designing for the women of today, Ms. Chiuri seeks to give them the fashion tools to express their personal style.

The Italian designer is at the helm of a French brand with a global presence. But while there is a mix of backgrounds at Dior, what connects those at the atelier is a shared passion.

"I think there is a language that is the language of fashion that is more important than English, French or Italian," Ms. Chiuri said.

Female empowerment

Outside of design, Dior is also supporting women through corporate programs.

Launched earlier this year on International Women's Day, Women@Dior is a mentorship program for young women. The initiative pairs students with members of Dior's team who are themselves under the age of 30.

While women may know they want to work in fashion, they may be unaware of the diversity of roles available within the industry. Women@Dior aims to help them discover their ideal job by connecting them with individuals who work in areas including design, marketing, retail and architecture.

Christian Dior also wielded tools that resonate well with modern audiences on Instagram, leading up to its spring/summer 2017 collection reveal.

Dior went behind-the-scenes on Instagram to bring the heart of its brand closer to consumers, with a video series that discusses female role models. Teasing the debut runway show from Ms. Chiuri, the video series takes a look at the women of its atelier as they work on the finishing touches and discuss who their role models are ([see story](#)).

"Sometimes in this moment where digital is so strong, we think that fashion is only one image," Ms. Chiuri said. "But it is not only one image, it is something more consistent."

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